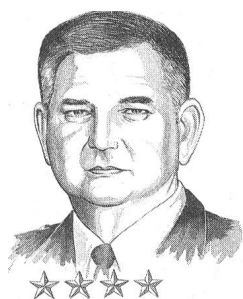


THE PROFESSION OF ARMS

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RECENTLY, Secretary of the Air Force Sheila Widnall and I articulated what we see as the core values held by our Air Force. These ideals are at the heart and soul of our military profession: integrity first, service before self, and excellence in all we do.

Such values are closely intertwined since integrity provides the bedrock for our military endeavors and is fortified by service to country. This in turn fuels the drive for excellence.

In light of the demands placed upon our people to support US security interests around the globe, I want to expand on the concept of “service before self.” As members of the joint team, we airmen are part of a unique profession that is founded on the premise of service before self. We are *not* engaged in just another job; we are practitioners of the profession of arms. We are entrusted with the security of our nation, the protection of its citizens, and the preservation of its way of life. In this capacity, we serve as guardians of America’s future. By its very nature, this responsibility requires us to place the needs of our service and our country before personal concerns.

Our military profession is sharply distinguished from others by what Gen Sir John Hackett has termed the “unlimited liability clause.” Upon entering the Air Force, we accept a sacred trust from the American people.

We swear to support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic. We take this obligation freely without any reservations. We thereby commit our lives in defense of America and her citizens should that become necessary.

No other profession expects its members to lay down their lives for their friends, families, or freedoms. But our profession readily expects its members to willingly risk their lives in performing their professional duties. By voluntarily serving in the military profession, we accept unique responsibilities. In today’s

world, service to country requires not only a high degree of skill but a willingness to make personal sacrifices.

We work long hours to provide the most combat capability possible for the taxpayer dollar. We go TDY or PCS to harsh locations to meet the needs of the nation. We are on call 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Should a contingency arise that requires our immediate deployment to far corners of the globe, we go without complaint.

Inherent in all this is the individual’s willingness to subordinate personal interests for the good of one’s unit, one’s service, and one’s nation. We can ill afford individuals who become “sunshine soldiers” or get focused on careerism. Instead, we need professionals who strive to be the best at their current job and who realize they attain individual advancement through the success of their unit or work center.

Careerism can be most damaging in the case of leaders. If subordinates perceive leaders as self-consumed with career concerns, then they will be unwilling to forgo personal goals for the good of the unit and the Air Force.

This situation is only aggravated by attempts to serve “through a position,” or to do a quick “touch and go” in a key job simply to fill out a resumé. Ultimately, the mission will suffer with potentially devastating consequences.

We recently took action to address similar concerns with the Officer Voluntary Assignment System. Numerous critical jobs went unfilled because they were not perceived as attractive for career advancement. That was bad for our Air Force and for the nation.

Consequently, we revamped the system to embody the fundamental premise of “service before self.” The new Officer Assignment System puts the needs of the Air Force above individual desires. Officers still have the opportunity to volunteer for a variety of jobs, but ultimately, the Air Force mission takes precedence. This approach to officer assignments will help maintain service as the touchstone of our profession.

So what’s the payoff for placing service before self? It isn’t solely the paycheck or the benefits that keep us going. In my 32 years of service, I’ve met many men and women who embody this concept of service be-

fore self. They remain with the Air Force because of the intangibles—the satisfaction gained from doing something significant with their lives; the pride in being part of a unique organization that lives by high standards; and the sense of accomplishment gained from defending our nation and its democratic way of life.

In times past, others have made tremendous sacrifices to join this unique profession that places service before self. Lt Gen Benjamin O. Davis, Jr., suffered through nearly four years of brutal silencing at West Point because of cadet prejudice against African-Americans. But he persevered and earned his commission.

Upon entering active duty, he confronted many forms of bigotry but would not be denied the chance to serve his country. He aggressively pursued the opportunity to fly and led the initial cadre of Tuskegee Airmen through flight training in 1941. Next, he commanded the first all-black US fighter squadron in combat during World War II, helping to disprove myths

about blacks' inability to fly and fight.

Subsequently, General Davis led the first all-black fighter group to great distinction in Europe. His 332d Fighter Group never lost a single bomber on 200 escort missions. Moreover, it earned a Distinguished Unit Citation for a 1,600-mile escort mission to Berlin that resulted in the downing of three Me-262 jets in March 1945.

Ultimately, General Davis enjoyed a long and distinguished military career in which he played a pivotal role in the successful integration of African-Americans into our Air Force. We can learn much from his extraordinary perseverance and willingness to subordinate personal concerns to serving his country, even under the toughest of circumstances.

If you would be successful in our profession in the United States Air Force, then take your lead from those who have gone before. Make unflinching honesty and integrity the hallmarks of your performance. Aggressively pursue excellence in all that you do. And place service before self.

Gen Ronald R. Fogleman (USAFA; MA, Duke University) is chief of staff of the United States Air Force. A command pilot with more than 6,300 hours, General Fogleman has commanded an Air Force wing and air division, directed Air Force programs on the Air Staff, and served as commander of the Seventh Air Force of Pacific Air Forces with the added responsibility as deputy commander of US Forces Korea and commander of Korean and US air components assigned under the Combined Forces Command. Prior to becoming chief of staff, he was commander in chief of the US Transportation Command and commander of the Air Force's Air Mobility Command. General Fogleman is a graduate of the Army War College.

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